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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2214
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7474
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1661
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 7209
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 3289
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 1727
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2890
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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SUBJECT: SOUTH WAZIRISTAN'S CONTINUING MILITANCY

REF: PESHAWAR 347

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Concurrent with the much-publicized breakdown of the North Waziristan Agreement, the GOP's agreement in South Waziristan has also been faltering. The result has been increasingly brazen militant attacks on security forces, including the recent kidnapping of 19 Frontier Corps (FC) personnel. The conciliatory nature of the jirga assembled to negotiate for their release, the beheading of one captive, and the fact it took over two weeks to reach a deal is not a good omen for GOP control of South Waziristan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On August 28, a group of approximately 19 FC personnel and other local officials were released after being held since early August by militants in South Waziristan. (Note: Sixteen were kidnapped on August 9, and the others were kidnapped on August 25. End Note.) News of the release, however, coincided with humiliating photos in all major Pakistani newspapers of the kidnapped soldiers seated while masked gunmen stood over them. The still photos were taken from a gruesome video recently released by the kidnappers that captured the beheading of one of the FC soldiers on August 14.

¶3. (C) A "peace committee" of prominent tribal and religious leaders from the area and led by parliamentarians Maulana Merajuddin and Maulana Saleh Shah secured the group's release. While the parliamentarians announced that the release was unconditional, local observers speculate that the GOP will quietly release ten militants whose freedom had been demanded by militant leader Baitullah Mehsud. The government has also reportedly agreed to uphold the 2005 peace agreement with the militants that stipulated no army checkpoints in South Waziristan and essentially gave local militants the responsibility for "maintaining law and order" in the eastern (Mehsud) areas of South Waziristan.

¶4. (C) Comment: The prolonged capture of GOP security personnel is emblematic of how little control the military has in South Waziristan. Most tribal observers see the conciliatory nature of the jirga and the GOP's concessions as a victory for the Mehsud militants and the humiliating photos as a propaganda coup. Both parliamentarians Maulana Merajuddin and Maulana Saleh Shah are widely reputed to have sympathies with the militants, thus many of the other jirga

members expressed disgust with the process. By Pashtun tradition, the gruesome beheading of one of the FC men and humiliating treatment of the security personnel demanded a strong response from the government. The weak response will likely embolden them to continue attacking government forces in the tribal areas and adjacent settled districts of the Northwest Frontier Province. End Comment.

PATTERSON